ANNUAL ADMINISTRATION REPORT OF THE SIND FOREST CIRCLE FOR THE YEAR 1896-97.

INTRODUCTION.

The year under report is the second in the working of the forests under the coupe contract system. Although the absence of competition among the bidders has stood in the way of obtaining more favourable prices for the standing crop on the area set apart for exploitation, it is hoped there will be an appreciable rise in revenue in the near future. Other characteristic features of the report are—

(*a*) the remarkable decrease in the number of forest fires, notably in the extent of destruction caused by them, which was partly the result of the somewhat favourable circumstances of the year and partly of the punitive measures which were adopted since 1895-96; and

(*b*) the specially extensive scale of the cultural operations undertaken during the year in view of the regeneration of a great many of the treeless tracts.

2. There were practically no exclusions during the year from the forest area, while that added by afforestment and rectifications of errors amounted to 3 square miles and 535 acres, which raised the area at close of the year to $1{,}068\frac{373}{640}$ square miles.

3. Efforts were made to remove the discrepancies in the forest areas recorded in the forest forms and the agricultural returns, but they were hampered by unforeseen difficulties which unhappily cropped up.

4. Against the area lost by erosion (3,514 acres), 17,922 acres of fresh alluvial lands appeared in front of the forests by the changes in the course of the river. The material on the eroding banks was cut and removed partly by contract and partly by departmental agency.

5. Exclusive of the six undecided claims on 1st July 1896, twenty new claims to *kachas* were made, out of which decision was arrived at in 17, leaving 9 pending on 30th June 1897.

6. The areas proposed for reservation and those under different stages of enquiry under the Forest Act amounted to $16{,}862\frac{1}{8}$ acres.

7. In the $18\frac{673}{1760}$ linear miles of the new reserves demarcated during the year, 185 boundary marks were erected, which cost in the aggregate a sum of Rs. 188-5-0. The number of boundary marks put up and replaced, as well as the length in miles of boundary paths cleared and repaired, was respectively 14,375 and 1,406. This was, as usual, carried out free of cost with the assistance of maldars and others.

8. No regular survey of the forests took place during the year.

9. It is gratifying to note that, for the first time in the history of the Sind Forest Department, the preparation of regular Working Plans was taken in hand in the year of report, and working Circles were formed in five of the forest blocks in the Sukkur Division, the area thus dealt with being 17,000 acres. Fifty-six linear miles of compartment lines were cut, comprising within their pale 13,760 acres of forest land. The average cost per mile was Rs. 9-12-3.

10. On repairs and the construction of new buildings, the outlay of the year was Rs. 457.

11. The number of new cases taken into Court during the year was 60 against 85 of the year before. Of the 52 cases disposed of in 1896-97, conviction was obtained in 34, and the percentage of failure for the two years was 40 and 35, respectively, while the cases compounded under S. 67 of the Indian Forest Act rose from 2,029 to 2,162.

12. The area closed against the grazing of browsers and other animals is in excess of what it was in 1895-96 for the sole reason that there is an urgent need for bringing a vast area under reproduction.

13. The impoundings have been heavier, the figures of 1896-97 showing an excess of 8,620 head of animals over those of 1895-96. The increase is mainly among browsers.

14. The value of free labour availed of for the purposes of constructing and repairing boundary marks and paths as well as erecting hedges round the compartments under reproduction in the different Divisions of the Circle is estimated at Rs. 10,266 in the aggregate.

15. The season was one of normal inundation, in consequence of which the natural reproduction was of an average character, and the efforts made to reproduce certain areas artificially also met with a fair amount of success. In the Kot Sultan plantation, cultural operations were undertaken in a further area of 687 acres. The young crop of seedlings, natural as well as artificial, was more or less injured by frost in some of the forests of Upper and Central Sind.

16. The average price per acre realised by the sale of the standing crop in the coupes marked out for exploitation during 1896-97 was Rs. 8-0-4 against Rs. 6-0-8 of the year previous.

17. From grazing fees, the receipts of the year amounted to Rs. 58,470, *i.e.*, there was an increase of Rs. 1,390 over those of the one preceding.

18. The gross as well as the surplus revenue of the Forest year exhibit a falling off of Rs. 1,53,448 and Rs. 52,850, respectively, owing to unprecedented circumstances. In the first place, the cost of the departmental fellings formed an item of credit on the revenue side for a portion of the year 1895-96, and in the second place the instalments, amounting to Rs. 61,000, due from coupe contractors and payable before the end of June 1897 could not be recovered in time, and the revenue realised by the sale of bahan timber fell short of the expectations owing to the outbreak of plague.

CHAPTER I.

EXTENSION AND CONSTITUTION OF STATE FORESTS.

I.—Alteration of Area.

Changes during the year.

19. The modifications in area that have taken place during the past year are given in detail in Forms Nos. 46 and 46A. The following abstract statement shows the net results of these changes :—